



Manager Mark Stevenson will tend bar Sunday during an "Irish Wake" for the beloved Gurnet Inn.

Local Beach Landmark Marks Final Season

By PAULA MAXWELL

A familiar beachfront landmark in the Gurnet Road area is about to close its doors for the final season now that the property is about to be sold.

Gurnet Inn Manager Mark Stevenson said that it's hard to believe that after one hundred years the beloved location will soon disappear.

The Inn's long time owner, Mark's aunt, 80-year old Jean Stevenson, has approved a sales agreement for the .8 of an acre property with a final closing expected in early December. A Braintree contractor has agreed to buy the property for reported \$1 million and plans to raze the two buildings there to build a new house, according to Mark.

This Sunday, family members, customers and friends will celebrate the inn and mark its closing at what is described by

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Gurnet Inn to Close for Final Season

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family members as an "Irish wake."

"We're expecting lots of people who have a special spot in their heart for this place, lots of regulars and old friends who are sad to see it go," said Mark.

On the fifth anniversary of the devastating 1991 "No-Name" storm which extensively damaged the Gurnet Inn, Mark's brother Chuck wrote a piece for the *Clipper* recalling the history of the famous Inn, where he and his four brothers and sisters worked and played growing up each summer.

"...Originally a private residence known as the Gurnet House, it had undergone several transformations. First as a tea room, then a guest house which then became an inn with oceanfront dining on the first floor and guest rooms on the second. The repeal of prohibition saw the barn along the street turned into a bar room which was eventually connected to the main building with the addition of a cocktail lounge complete with piano, easy chairs couches and a juke

box. The last major renovation occurred in the early 1950's when the guest rooms, dining room and kitchen in the main building were replaced by eight efficiency apartment units for guests and an additional apartment which served as the office and owners' residence. Each of the apartments ran from the front to the back of the building providing every unit with a direct ocean view.

"Finished with knotty pine interiors, each apartment came complete with separate bedrooms, living room/kitchen combinations. Fully furnished and tastefully decorated, each one had its own personality...."

One constant throughout all these transformations was the Cosgrove family and Jean Cosgrove Stevenson in particular. The Gurnet, as it was most commonly known was originally purchased by Jean's grandmother. Her mother and father, Pop and Maise were the next owners. Jean's sister and brother in law, Louise and Bill Weldon, transformed the inn to efficiency apartment units and shortly after that, Jean and her husband, Jack purchased the inn, running it together as a team until Jack's death in 1989.

Since then, Jean has continued her ownership arriving in the spring to open the business and returning to Southern Pines NC in the fall after the inn closed for the winter.

Mark said that Jean still works five days a week at the Mid Pines Club resort hotel and golf course there that her parents owned and operated until the 1970's. Through the years there has been "a Gurnet Inn" connection formed with this



golf rich part of North Carolina.

Today most people in Duxbury and Marshfield associate the Gurnet Inn with the popular bar and lounge but before 1991, regular visitors from all areas of the country and many different walks of life spent vacations there. It was not uncommon for two and three generations to frequent the inn with many returning guests coming for over 20 years, according to Chuck.

He recalled that severe weather is the norm when you live along the coast but before 1991, the worst blow was the blizzard of 1978 when three relentless flood high tides caused over \$90,000 worth of damage.

"After that we thought if we could survive that, we could survive anything," he said.

"That line of thinking changed on the afternoon and early evening of October 30, 1991...after the storm."

"The memory of coming to the front of the building seems unreal to this day. Every wall and window on the first floor along the front of the building was gone. The front porch that had run the length of the building along the second floor was gone and a portion of the second floor had collapsed into the first floor. The solid cement patio that attached the sea wall to the building was shattered into pieces at the northeast corner of the building and the ocean had lowered the level of the land down six feet splitting the foundation of the building. Shattered glass and furniture were everywhere.

"The next day's light the total scope of the damage came into focus. The force of the water crashing into the building had blown out the walls and all but knocked out the support beams, buckled the floors, and pushed the whole structure back over six inches from its foundation....

"Any scheme to rescue part or all of the building required much more of an investment than was available in insurance money dooming the main part of the building. Massive work was required just to save the bar and lounge.

"The days immediately following the storm brought a steady stream of customers and friends with offerings of help and condolences."

Since that time, two apartments which were once housing for summer help, were rebuilt at the Gurnet Inn site and they stand on what was once a two room cottage. The building set back from the beach has one apartment on each floor, occupied during the summer by people who used to stay at the inn.

In the building that houses the bar and lounge above what is the owner's kitchen, a living room and bedroom were added that Jean Stevenson occupied each summer. The bar and lounge miraculously remained virtually intact and unchanged through the storm.

Inn parties and gatherings of all kinds celebrating good times and bad will be recalled. Mark said that many funerals for old friends and customers ended up at the inn.

Mark recalled that at one party for a regular customer who was going in for surgery to get a pacemaker a friend showed up in a meatcutters outfit wearing a surgical mask.

He said birthday parties, anniversaries, playoff games and funerals were all part of the Inn's functions throughout the years.

"There have been many happy times and fond memories made here," he said. "I proposed to my wife out on that sea wall out there."

Folk lore about the Inn is as common as the tides, he said. During Prohibition, a barn used to be at the site. Rum runners from Duxbury would be sent signals from the front sitting room alerting them to when it was safe to bring the liquor down by boat. From there some of it would be stored and brought up to Hanover. The Fairview Inn site in Marshfield was another known drop off spot.

Mark said that Jean's mother or grandmother is said to have first bought the name "Gurnet Inn" from a former inn owner on Powder Point.

Sunday's bash will be a chance to remember and share the many stories. Jean will be coming up from North Carolina on Friday according to her nephew, who has helped manage the Gurnet Inn for the past 22 years.

Those who cherish the place most will be there to toast a century of memories and everyone is welcome, he said.